

# **A G E N D A**

Fire Commission

Regular Business Meeting

October 11, 2018

6:00PM

1. Call Meeting to Order: George Planchock, Chair
2. Pledge of Allegiance
3. Announcements:
4. Consider the minutes of September 13, 2018
5. Old Business
  - a. Fire Service Discussion
6. New Business
  - a. Fire Budget Discussion
  - b. John Holahan Update – Legislature Update
7. Fire Commission Report/Comment
8. Public Comment

## **ADJOURNMENT**

**AUDIO AND VIDEO RECORDING IN PROGRESS**

TOBYHANNA TOWNSHIP FIRE COMMISSION  
REGULAR MEETING  
OCTOBER 11, 2018

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The Regular Meeting of the Tobyhanna Township Fire Commission was held on October 11, 2018, at the Tobyhanna Township Government Center Building, 105 Government Center Way, Pocono Pines, Pennsylvania, 18350.

Present are George Planchock, John Kerrick, and John Holahan. Mark Argot is not present.

1. Chair George Planchock calls the meeting to order at 6:00PM.
2. The Pledge of Allegiance is recited.
3. Announcements
  - a. George Planchock states the Commission entered Executive Session on September 13, 2018 at 7:18PM to discuss personnel.
  - b. George Planchock hopes for a speedy recovery for Mark Argot.
4. Minutes
  - a. The Commission tables the approval of the minutes from September 13, 2018.
5. Old Business
  - a. Fire Service Discussion. George Planchock states he asked Troy Counterman to present stipend information. Troy Counterman states Lake Placid pays \$3-\$4 per hour per call. Four members of the DPW are in the fire company. They carry a pager, and are the ones that get the truck for a call. They are paid their DPW wages when responding to a call while other firefighters receive the stipend.

A former Tobyhanna Township Volunteer Fire Company (TTVFC) member now lives in Connecticut, and he gets paid a stipend of \$3.00 per hour, which amounts to \$500 - \$1,000 per year per person. One fire company in Northampton County has a stipend of \$5 per call. Coolbaugh Township is considering \$10 per call and \$8 for every day of training. The hours invested by TTVFC are 10,000 -15,000 hours per year, so John Jablowski believes \$300,000 would cover costs. Another company gives each member \$200 - \$300/year, depending on their position. John Kerrick asks if it is more common to pay per hour or per call. Troy Counterman states it seems per call is more common. Ed Tutrone states TTVFC has had 221 calls for May through October of this year. George Planchock asks if any fire companies indicated that the stipend was working. Troy Counterman states they gained a couple firefighters.



Troy Counterman states during the day, there may be 10 firefighters in the area. The stipend would help with nighttime and weekend calls. Last year, an average of 5-6 people responded per call. This year, they moved to a percentage system and the response rates have increased to 7.8 people per call now.

Ed Tutrone states automatic alarms are a large problem: 82 of the 221 between May and October were automatic alarms. Per the ordinance, after three false alarms in a month, the owner is fined \$25. New York City fines \$5,000 for a false alarm. He suggests extending a courtesy letter once, then charging a \$100 fine. Nuisance alarms are a waste of manpower and resources.

There are very few responses for automatic alarms in the middle of the night. Troy Counterman states there were 415 calls last year. The Commission directs John Holahan to research the ordinance. Troy Counterman suggests starting a plan now: TTVFC will need some sort of paid program in the next five years.

Ed Tutrone presents the statistics for Wilson Borough. They have 7 full-time employees including a chief, 18 part-time paid drivers, and 5 paid on-call firefighters. There are two people each on three 8-hour shifts. If it is a fire call, Easton Borough is immediately dispatched. 60% of their 900 calls are QRS. Drivers must have a minimum certification of Firefighter 1 (FF1) and in-house training. A call firefighter makes \$9.73/hr. Once they have FF1 but aren't a driver, they get \$10.47/hr. As soon as the company went paid, volunteers left. The fire company spends \$641,000 in wages, and the Borough pays out \$1 million in health benefits for the fire department. Their budget has about \$100,000 for equipment, and no provisions for apparatus replacement. The Borough cashed in CDs to buy a new firetruck in 2017. The health benefits include all insurances, including worker's compensation. John Kerrick asks the rate per \$100 for worker's compensation for a firefighter. Ed Tutrone will get the number.

Ed Tutrone states it would cost Tobyhanna Township \$2.5 million a year for a four-person shift. The township's coverage area is large and the call volume is low. John Holahan states when the ambulance is dispatched, people get billed and insurance picks up the tab. Is there anything like that for fire? Ed Tutrone states you can't bill for a regular fire, only extraordinary expenses.

The Commission decides the fire ordinance must be researched and updated to better address false alarms. Julia Heilakka states the township processes alarm violations for the police; processing false fire calls may feasibly be added to this.

George Planchock recaps the conversation so far: the fire ordinance will be researched with the intent to update fines, and will be revisited by the Board of Supervisors. John Holahan will put forward pro forma for how much a stipend program will cost, and we must discern how to track calls.

John Kerrick suggests \$10 per call, and asks for written criteria for being paid from the fire department, to present to the Board. Troy Counterman suggests a stipend per call vs. hourly so people can't take advantage of the system. Ed Tutrone states that firefighters won't receive any payment if they are under a 25% response rate for calls.

6. New Business

- a. Fire Budget Discussion. Ed Tutrone explains line items of budget. There is confusion regarding how Pocono Mountain Volunteer Fire Company (PMVFC) assists with calls, and the Commission would like to revisit the MOU. Relief Fund money is down because in-state insurance doesn't have to pay to the relief fund, and more people are using in-state insurance companies. John Kerrick motions to recommend the approval of the fire budget with additional money to building maintenance if possible, George Planchock seconds. Vote: motion carries.
- b. John Holahan update. John Holahan states he spoke with Jack Rader. No one is interested in having the conversation because of reelection season. ISO ratings may drop with a paid fire company in the area.

7. Commission Report/Comment

- a. John Holahan states the Commission's recommendation to appoint Troy Counterman was tabled. There was discussion regarding active firefighters being allowed to sit on the Commission. The Board suggested increasing the Commission's size from five to seven, with two non-voting members. Those advisory chairs would be the chief and president of the fire department or their designees. The township solicitor is recommending that apparatus titles remain with the fire department due to liability.
- b. The Commission discusses PSVFC.

8. Public Comment – none.

9. John Holahan motions to adjourn, meeting adjourned at 7:39PM.

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Minutes recorded by Julia Heilakka